

## META-PHOR AND THE AUDIO-COMMUNICATORY EVENT: NEW MODES OF RESEARCH

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Much concern within the discipline of ethnomusicology surrounds the questions-- "How do we go about doing what we do?" and "How can we use the information that we gather?" The answer to the second question relies very much on the way in which we respond to the first question. Traditionally accepted techniques of inquiry such as transcription are frequently seen as limiting in scope and troubled by culture specificity. New ways of addressing our task are always being sought. Part of the problem we face has to do with the fact that musicologists for the most part have concerned themselves with sound structure or form syntax and internal relevance. This approach causes practical problems in that music transcribed in descriptive notation from performance is most certainly subjective and very likely to contain errors. Yet another difficulty inherent in this method is a need to deal with the fact that music is both multi-faceted in construct and multi-dimensional in function.

Unfortunately, musicology has yet to find a satisfactory way to analyze sound patterns within the context of social patterns, and vice versa. There have, of course, been attempts to do so, most notably Alan Lomax's *Folk Song Style and Culture*. The parameters which Lomax sets up, however, have no real relationship to social or cultural structures. They may provide us with additional data beyond the usual "musical"

analysis, but only to the extent of social or class layering in that "the more extreme, radical and rigid a system of social distance, the more intensively a system of musical deference or elaboration must be employed."<sup>1</sup> Lomax's tool is grossly limited. Attempting to make the leap from context to symbol without examining any other social, political, ideological, or individual elements, Lomax examines only the tip of our field of study. Music production is not so limited, and it functions not only as entertainment or to promote group identity, but rather includes other functions which relate to all of these aforementioned socio-cultural elements.

Despite the fact that music manifests itself in many ways, and that to discuss music we must include its functional areas, our research is not fractured into unresolvable problems. Indeed, there still seems to remain something universal about what Charles Seeger calls the "Audio-Communicatory Event."<sup>2</sup> In reference to this fact, Seeger poses the following question: "How is it that there are many kinds of music, but that they are not as mutually unintelligible to their makers as are the many kinds of speech that we call languages to their makers?"<sup>3</sup> How is it indeed? The assumption must be that there is a kind of framework in which the "Audio-Communicatory Event" occurs that is common to all cultures. We may believe, therefore, that there is indeed a universal aspect to this realm of sound production. Just as we use metaphor to illuminate objects or concepts, every step within musical production and performance stands as a metaphor for that which the performer wishes to communicate. The entire cycle of the "Audio-Communicatory Event" may therefore be viewed as the combination of all the indi-

vidual metaphoric steps specific to a given cultural or ethnic group's repertoire, a kind of meta-metaphor. If this meta-phor could be delineated within an analytic framework, and if all the multi-dimensional functions are accounted for, a tool for cross-cultural musical analysis could be arrived at, and applied ethnomusicology would take a giant step forward. Our work would no longer be limited to our own ethnocentric boundaries, but rather would be relevant cross-culturally. This paper aims to present the groundwork for such a tool from which further research may continue.

To arrive at such a scheme there is perhaps no better reference point to begin with than the work of Charles Seeger. Drawing, as structuralists do, upon linguistic models for his musical conspectus, Seeger sees structure and function as a basis for classifying music. Structure, in his eyes, can be "the physical form of a particular artifact and of aggregates of artifacts, the patterns of belief and behavior observed in the individuals who produce the artifacts, and the patterns of population distribution and social class these individuals represent."<sup>4</sup> Function may be seen as "traditions or ways of making, using, believing and doing things that have been inherited, invented, cultivated and transmitted by these individuals."<sup>5</sup> Function may also be seen as the "relative intensity of the activity (and the) relative dependence and interdependence of the traditions of a culture, and to the combined operation in the culture as a whole and in the living bodies of the carriers."<sup>6</sup> Structure and function, according to Seeger, exhibit the following characteristics:

#### A. EXTRINSIC

1. **Geographical area.** This may affect actual instrumentation (the ability to build certain instruments

due to natural resources) and the spread of music tradition.

2. **Culture area.** This can be used to seek relevance for the coincidence and non-coincidence of musical traits.

3. **Political area.** Insight into the national gestalt.

4. **Social strata.** We may find cultural and reverse cultural hegemony here.

5. **Sex, Age group, Occupation, etc.** Music made by certain people for certain people.

6. **Social function.** Alan Merriam has listed ten functions which would fall into this category: (1) emotional expression, (2) aesthetic enjoyment, (3) entertainment, (4) communication, (5) symbolic representation, (6) physical response, (7) enforcing conformity with social norms, (8) validation of social institutions and religious rituals, (9) contribution to the continuity of culture, (10) contribution to the integration of society.

7. **Focuses of interest.** We see that music is a value system and the focuses of interest as necessarily valuable.

## B. INTRINSIC

1. **Own-not own traditions.** The differences between traditions.

2. **Own-not own tastes.** The differences between tastes.

3. **Expert and less expert.** This gives us the chance to consider qualitative (high degree of expertness) with quantitative (all degrees of expertness) traits.

4. **Creative and re-creative.** The difference between composers (creators) and performers (re-creators).

5. **Written and unwritten.** Traditional versus non-traditional.

6. **Self-made and made by others.** The difference between the musically productive and the musically mute.

7. **Free and priced.** Commercial art versus folk craft.

8. **Tradition and non-tradition.** Aesthetic versus function.

9. **Music technical functions.** Function viewed as intrinsic to music.<sup>7</sup>

While Seeger has carefully separated music as a symbol from that context which

defines it, Merriam's functions are more closely related to system. The combination of Seeger's and Merriam's classification is a major step in our viewing the musical event within its context rather than abstracting the musical sign and using only that singular aspect of the event for analysis. Yet, while their work is seminal in creating an analytical tool, they still stand only as a starting point, a reference, due to their taxonomic nature.

A taxonomic approach is useful **only** as categorization. It also possesses a major problem. When categorizing the changing complexes of social function in music (as Seeger has done), we must make sure that we do not anthropomorphize the music by endowing it with human features. Music itself has no social nature. It is people who endow it with such, via **our** changing social complexes. There is a social nature of people. People create something we have chosen to call music, and this temporal creation, by its very fleeting and changing nature, cannot exist by itself without people. Therefore it **does not** have its own social quality, but at best, borrows, elaborates upon, and stands for certain human social acts and responses.

If then music stands for social acts and responses, it **must** exist as a sign, and if it exists as a sign, there should be a way in which we can define the "Audio-Communicatory Act" (performance and its many ramifications) as a series of **sign products, interpretants, and meanings**. (A sign in this paper will be used in the guise of symbol. A sign represents the idea which it produces [sign products]; that which a sign stands for is called its **referent**; that which a sign conveys is its **meaning**; and the idea(s) which signs give rise to, the **interpretant**.)

The framework we seek would not organize signs, but provide the rules which would generate the interpretant signs as a concrete occurrence. Within such a system the signs would become a network of changing relationships (just as human social response is) that, despite their fluid nature, would remain in constant proximity to each other. This proximity would indeed remain constant, regardless of the human actor, since each interpretant the performer creates is dependent upon another sign to give it meaning.

Such interdependence of signs is an aspect of analysis that structuralists and musicologists frequently omit from their work. It is the missing **context**. It is what can give our work meaning. It further allows for music production to be seen as the cyclic event it truly is. An example may help clarify this point.

If we were to consider an actual musical performance as a sign (actually secondary sign), it is an interpretant of a medium, which is an interpretant of a specific context, which is an interpretant of social nature, which may be an interpretant of custom, ritual, audience response, and so on. As Charles Morris has said, "The meaning of a sign is both its signification and its interpretant, and neither alone."<sup>8</sup> A sign does not communicate *in vacuo*, but in a given context, in relationship to other signs. The meaning of signs is always the sum total of all the conditions of its creation.

These thoughts lead us to three basic assumptions which should be included in musicological research. The Audio-Communicatory Act is:

1. **Architectonic**, in that we can see its structure as being a series of steps.
2. **Teleological**, in that it is goal oriented toward the creation of sign(s).

3. It has a **medium**, which encodes and articulates ideology and social reality.

Based upon these three assumptions, a framework designed to incorporate this approach should show that:

1. Music refers by association to categories (of thought, culture) which are not immediately given in transcription.

2. The features within this approach will change with the hierarchical weights conferred upon them by their various fields of information and the people involved.

3. Music is a sign, and therefore the interpretant (and all of music) is symbolic fact.

With this information and the former assumptions, a framework can begin to take shape.

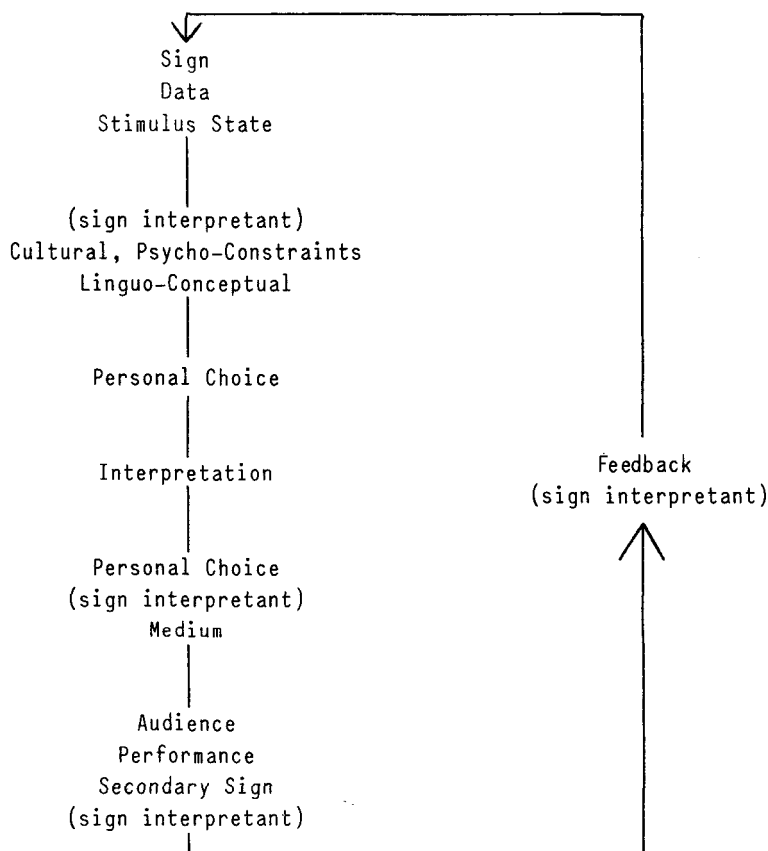
Sign is an object "in the world."<sup>9</sup> It is describable in terms of its effect and is thus accessible. Because it is an object, and since signs elicit dispositions to respond, it must possess its own positive quality, the quality of the **stimulus state**. We may, for the time being, consider this to be our starting point. The essence of sign production must lie within this stimulus state, for it is only upon reflection of it that we can enter the actual "existent." Simply put, there must be some prereflexive, some inspirational event or thing, physical or metaphysical, which gives rise to the creative act. Given this premise, the "existent" must also, as is the nature of sign, be an interpretant. It must present a discernible piece of information ready to be transmitted and act as a "snapshot" of the stimulus state in which consciousness of the present becomes the consciousness of previous consciousness. The detected piece of information must be seen as data specific. Each inspirational stimulus state generates its own unique information to be used by the performer and

his audience. For an example from material culture, Simon Bronner in a recent dissertation discusses chain carving.<sup>10</sup> The carvers often use standard cut 2 X 4 pieces of lumber. The lumber here represents the stimulus state. The size of the chain can obviously be no larger than the 2 X 4 from which it is carved (in terms of weight and bulk). The 2 X 4 carried its own data. The same must hold true for music production. The stimulus state must provide certain data that the "creator" must take into account. Each new performer may utilize this data different ways, but he or she is still bound by data restrictions. At this point the data is available to creator, craftsman, or musician and must be used in respect to all the intrinsic and extrinsic characteristics that Seeger and Merriam delineate. I have chosen to call these the cultural, linguo-conceptual (in that what we do is affected by our language limitations), and psychological constraints.

It is at this point in our scheme that the "accessible sign" is transformed into "private forum." Here the creator/re-creator enters the realm of idiosyncratic bounds, and the "element of consciousness" is at its fullest. It is at this point that most musico-logical analysis falters. This flaw need not so dramatically affect our work if we can recognize that the conceptual and verbal meanings released in us are what structuralists call mediation. They are a part of the interpretants associated with our human-ness. They are the aspects of our culture that validate our signs. Even in our absence the limitations of our language, **Weltanschauung**, and social functions are the considerations through which our personal choice is determined when selecting data for presentation and producing data for consumption.



As Levi-Strauss has stated, there is a constant passage in both directions between data and information, ingestion and production. The nature of performance depends upon this fact, for just as stimulus state data production does not occur without an audience (the creator/re-creator), neither does performance. Just as we give data as well as receive it, the audience creates performance as well as witnesses it, and as such, they too are signs and interpretants. The following chart should illustrate how one could see performance in this scheme.



As stated earlier, the hierarchical weights conferred upon each of these aspects may change, but their proximity would remain constant. The impact of the audience now in focus, their feedback would set up a new stimulus state, and the performance would be cyclic.

Now that we have arrived at a point where the framework is apparent, the question arises as to how to ascertain these features in our research. Must the ethnomusicologist be a social and behavioral scientist? I think not, but we must be able to delineate social forces in a comprehensible way, for, as Mantle Hood states,

The extent to which extrinsic forces may affect a society (and its music) depends on the relative strength of its musico-socio-cultural consciousness, its viability in terms of rejection, acculturation and assimilation or ultimate loss of identity. Sometimes the extrinsic and intrinsic forces exerted on the socio-cultural consensus may have a very direct effect on the musical consensus, which establishes the norms of musical style.<sup>11</sup>

If understanding social forces is so important to our work and since there already exist sociological tools for gathering such information, it would seem foolhardy to ignore them. These tools are designed to increase objectivity and minimize cultural bias. Despite the limitations of his work, Alan Lomax has made large strides using the General Inquirer System in analyzing text for normative cultural indicators, as well as utilizing cantometrics and choreometrics. Additional tools such as Hadley Cantrel's Self-Anchoring Sliding Scale for Self Alienation, in which the respondents actualize their perceived position in the world, may be useful in delineating cultural gestalt. Signs at this point cease to be symbols that tell us what was done: they begin to tell us why.

To recapitulate, it appears that prior ethnomusicological research becomes trenchant by confining itself to a single criterion or approach, rather than expanding through integral methods. The method suggested above delineates a corpus of communicative components and would elaborate upon the social and contextual setting. It considers performance as part of the communicative event with all of its individual, social, and cultural qualifiers which shape the form and function of the performance.

Perception of the social/cultural extent of music is determined by the capacity of the research to reveal the numerous levels of communication which unfold during the Audio-Communicatory Event. These levels are interconnected through a process of signs/actions which change within a given time and space. Therefore all the components and meta-communications which occur during performance are integral parts of the whole. Further, techniques exist, and others may be devised, by which to code these aspects of the event so as to provide quantifiable data.

This approach may truly give our work a basis of operation centered around its most important factor, people.

## NOTES

1. Alan Lomax, **Folk Song Style and Culture** (Washington: American Association for the Advancement of Science, 1968), pp. 153-4.
2. Charles Seeger, **Studies in Musicology: 1933-1975** (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1977), pp. 102-38.
3. Ibid., p. 140.
4. Ibid., p. 141.

5. Ibid., p. 141.
6. Ibid., p. 141.
7. Ibid., p. 144.
8. J. Jay Zeman, "Peirce's Theory of Signs," in **A Perfusion of Signs**, ed. Thomas A. Sebeok (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1977), p. 25.
9. Ibid., p. 25.
10. Simon Bronner, "Chain Carving in Southern Indiana" (Ph.D. diss., Indiana University, 1981).
11. Mantle Hood, **The Ethnomusicologist** (New York: McGraw-Hill, 1971), p. 301.